

# Apologies as illocutionary and social acts

Etsuko Oishi

## Abstract

The present paper proposes to provide a framework in which both theoretical and empirical studies of apologizing are reanalyzed, while different aspects of the act of apologizing are clarified. First, how each discipline or sub-discipline of the studies of apologies conceptualizes the act of apologizing is explained, and what aspect each tries to capture is discussed. Then a framework of speech acts is presented, in which different conceptions of apologies are properly placed and their relationships are clearly specified. Finally, politeness, gender, and cross-cultural diversities are discussed within the proposed framework.

*Key words: apologies, illocutionary acts, remedial moves, politeness, gender*

The research into apologies as a speech act cuts across different disciplines and sub-disciplines of language studies such as philosophy of language, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and ethnomethodology. Owing to this interdisciplinary nature, researchers do not share a theoretical framework that defines the act of apologizing, or that specifies how related issues like politeness, gender, and cross-cultural diversities should be included in the discussion. However, for the same reason, it has been a rich and promising area where analytical studies and empirical studies co-exist and benefit each other, and contribute to the clarification

of the conception of apologies as well as their linguistic and social functions.

The goal of the present paper is to provide a framework for analyzing apologies as illocutionary and social acts. In doing so, theoretical and empirical studies of apologizing are explained and reanalyzed, and different aspects of the act of apologizing are clarified. First the definitions of apologies provided by different disciplines or sub-disciplines are introduced, and how each conceptualizes the act of apologizing and what aspect each tries to capture are explained. Then a theoretical framework of illocutionary acts is presented, and social aspects of apologies and cross-cultural diversities of the act of apologizing are explained within the framework. Finally, politeness and gender issues are explained very briefly as the issues of the social relation between the speaker and the hearer, which is specified or indicated by the social relation between the addresser and the addressee.

## 1. Definitions of the act of apologizing

### *1.1 Speech act theory*

The definition of apologies depends on the research discipline within which they are analyzed. In speech act theory, the act of apologizing is classified as a *behabitive* by Austin (1962), and as an *expressive* by Searle (1979). However, the question is not about which category the act of apologizing is, or should be, classified into, but how the classifications of illocutionary acts are made, and how the act of apologizing is classified accordingly. In this section, Austin's and Searle's classifications of illocutionary forces/acts are given, and the discussions of the aspects of the illocutionary act/

force clarified by the classifications follow.

#### 1.1.1 J. L. Austin (1962)

Austin distinguishes five general classes of illocutionary acts: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives (151-164), although he does not explain the criteria by which these classes of illocutionary acts are distinguished. The classification is presented in the process of developing the concept of performatives, which contrast with constatives, into that of illocutionary acts/forces within the general theory of speech acts, where a list of illocutionary forces/acts of utterances, rather than that of “explicit performative verbs”, is necessitated (149-150). Austin himself acknowledges that the classification is general and preliminary, and he is not equally happy about these classes (150). He says, for example, the class of behabitives, to which the act of apologizing belongs, is troublesome because it is “miscellaneous” (152). Accordingly Austin’s classification of illocutionary force should be interpreted as an attempt to describe different types of illocutionary force of an utterance, which can be made explicit by performatives, and the classification gives a general picture of illocutionary acts the speaker can perform in uttering something.

The five classes of illocutionary force of an utterance are explained by Austin as follows:

- (1) Verdictives consist in the delivering of a finding, official or unofficial, upon evidence or reasons as to value or fact, as far as these are distinguishable (152).
- (2) An exercitive is the giving of a decision in favour of or

against a certain course of action, or advocacy of it (155).

- (3) The whole point of a commissive is to commit the speaker to a certain course of action (155).
- (4) Behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people's behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct (160).
- (5) Expositives are used in acts of exposition involving the expounding of views, the conducting of arguments, and the clarifying of usages and of references (161).

The illocutionary act of apologizing, which is our present concern, is included in the class of behabitives, and the acts in this class are described as reacting, or assuming or expressing attitudes, and distinguished from acts of delivering a fact, giving a decision, committing oneself to a certain action, and making expositions. The examples of behabitives include thanks, sympathy, attitudes, greetings, wishes, and challenging, as well as apologies, and they are made explicit by performative verbs, “thank”, “deplore”, “resent”, “welcome”, “bless”, “dare”, and “apologize” (150, 160).

Austin specifically mentions the act of apologizing in the explanation of the relationships between behabitives and other classes, i.e., verdictives and commissives. He says the verdictive utterance “I blame myself” has an illocutionary force similar to that of the behabitive utterance “I apologize”: “... in one sense of ‘blame’ which is equivalent to ‘hold responsible’, to blame is a verdictive, but in another sense it is to adopt an attitude towards a person, and it is thus a behabitive” (155). The utterance “I

apologize” can be a commissive, and the speaker commits herself<sup>1</sup> to avoiding the conduct she apologizes for (155).

Austin also explains how the illocutionary force of apologizing is made explicit. Although the utterance “I apologize” makes the illocutionary force/act of apologizing explicit, “I am sorry” is not a pure performative but a half descriptive (79), and the utterance “I am sorry to have to say ...” has nothing to do with performatives but is a “polite phrase” (81).

Within Austin’s classification of illocutionary forces/acts, the act of apologizing is explained as a behabitive type, which is to react, or assume or express attitudes. More specifically, it is the speaker’s act of reacting to her past conduct, and assuming or expressing the attitude of regret for it, while committing herself to avoiding the conduct. While the illocutionary force of apologizing can be made explicit by the performative utterance “I apologize”, and the illocutionary act of apologizing is performed, the utterance “I am sorry” describes the attitude of regret the speaker expresses or assumes, which does not necessarily express or assume the attitude of apologizing.

#### 1.1.2 John R. Searle (1969, 1979)

Searle seems to have a different goal of classifying illocutionary forces/acts: it is to specify each illocutionary force/act in comparing it with others on the basis of clear principles. Searle, therefore, criticizes Austin’s classification by saying “there is no clear principle of classification”, “there is a great deal of overlap from one category to another and a great deal of heterogeneity within some of the categories”, and “a very large number of verbs

find themselves smack in the middle of two competing categories” (Searle 1979: 10).

In Searle (1969: 54-55), a set of rules for the use of an illocutionary-force indicating devices is specified to explicate notions of illocutionary acts, and formulate their rules. Searle uses four rules, the propositional content rule, the preparatory rule, the sincerity rule, and the essential rule, by which the notion of each illocutionary act is clarified (57-64).

The notion of the illocutionary act of apologizing is specified by a set of rules for the use of the illocutionary-force indicating device of “I apologize”<sup>2</sup>. The propositional content rule for the illocutionary act of apologizing specifies, as its propositional content, past act *A* done by speaker *S*. The preparatory rule specifies, as its precondition, hearer *H* suffers from *A*, and *S* believes *H* suffers from *A*. The sincerity condition specifies, as the speaker’s feeling, *S* regrets doing *A*. The essential rule specifies, as its illocutionary effect, the act is counted as an expression of *S*’s regret for doing *A*. In other words, the illocutionary-force indicating device of “I apologize” is felicitously used when (i) there is a past act, which was done by the speaker, (ii) the hearer suffered/suffers from the act, and the speaker believes the hearer suffered/suffers from the act, and (iii) the speaker regrets for doing the act. Under these circumstances, the utterance “I apologize” is counted as an expression of the speaker’s regret for the act. That is, these four rules explain the structure of the illocutionary act: the illocutionary act is structured by (i) the state of affairs the act is about, which is specified by the propositional content rule, (ii) the circumstances under which the act is performed, which is

specified by the preparatory rule, (iii) the feelings/beliefs of the speaker, which is specified by the sincerity rule, and (iv) the effect of the illocutionary act, which is specified by the essential rule.

In Searle (1979), the criteria for illocutionary acts are developed, and a new classification of illocutionary acts is provided. While replacing the concept of essential conditions by illocutionary points, Searle adds, to those specified by the four rules/conditions, the criteria including (i) directions of fit (the words-to-world direction of fit, or the world-to-words direction of fit), (ii) the degree of strength/commitment, and (iii) the relation to the rest of the discourse (2-8). On the basis of the developed criteria, Searle provides a list of basic categories of illocutionary acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Brief descriptions of these categories are as follows:

- (1) Assertives: the point or purpose of assertives is to commit the speaker to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition. The direction of fit is words-to-world; the psychological state expressed is belief (that *p*) (12).
- (2) Directives: the illocutionary point of directives consists in the fact that they are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. The direction of fit is world-to-words and the sincerity condition is want. The propositional content is that the hearer does some future action (13-14).
- (3) Commissives: the illocutionary point of commissives is to commit the speaker herself to some future course of action. The direction of fit is world-to-words, and the sincerity

condition is intention. The propositional content is that the speaker does some future action (14).

- (4) Expressives: the illocutionary point of expressives is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about the state of affairs specified in the propositional content. There is no direction of fit, and the propositional content ascribes some property to either the speaker or the hearer (15-16).
- (5) Declarations: the successful performance of declarations brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality. The direction of fit is both words-to-world, and world-to-words. There is no sincerity condition (16-19).

Concerning the category of expressives, to which the illocutionary act of apologizing belongs, Searle says “in performing an expressive, the speaker is neither trying to get the world to match the words nor the words to match the world, rather the truth of expressed proposition is presupposed” (15).

As for the direction of fit, Recanati (1987: 155-156) claims, since the notion of direction of fit applies only to illocutionary acts which have a “referential” dimension, the first thing to do is distinguish acts that are essentially “content-conveying” from those that are not. He says illocutionary acts in the category of expressives is not content-conveying, and “the speaker conventionally expresses certain social attitudes vis-à-vis the hearer” (156).

Within Searle’s classification of illocutionary forces/acts, the



act of apologizing is explained as an expressive type, which is to express a psychological state. More specifically, it is the speaker's act of expressing her regret for doing a past act, which, she believes, the hearer suffered/suffers from.

### 1.1.3 Apologies as an illocutionary act

What is it to perform an illocutionary act of apologizing? In other words, what aspects of apologies are revealed by describing them as illocutionary acts? Austin (1962) tries to explain what makes an utterance as an apology: it is essentially reacting to one's past conduct, and assuming or expressing the attitude of regret for it, while committing oneself to avoiding the conduct in the future. Searle (1969, 1979), on the other hand, tries to answer the question in describing how the act of apologizing differs from other types of illocutionary act: the act of apologizing is to express one's regret for a past act, which, she believes, the hearer suffered/suffers from; it is distinguished from other illocutionary acts by the criteria based on the four rules/conditions, the directions of fit, and others. In this sense, Searle's analysis of the illocutionary act of apologizing and other acts is systematic. What Searle fails to see, however, is that to explain differences among illocutionary acts is not to explain what it is to perform an illocutionary act<sup>3</sup>.

Searle could rebut this point by saying that to perform, for example, an illocutionary act of apologizing is to say something with an intention of apologizing. However, since the speaker's intention works as an explanatory apparatus in Searle's intention-based speech act theory, such an explanation would be circular. In saying that the speaker performs an illocutionary act of

apologizing when she utters “I’m really sorry. This won’t happen again” with the intention of apologizing for her past conduct, we explain neither the intention of apologizing in terms of the illocutionary act of apologizing, nor the illocutionary act of apologizing in terms of the intention of apologizing: the illocutionary act is simply explained as, or even reduced to, the speaker’s intention. A similar point is made in Gauker (2007: 129).

In other words, the explication of the *normative, rule-governed* character of illocutionary acts does not contribute to the explanation of what the illocutionary act is, and how it is performed. As Alston (2000: 105) points out, the fact that the speaker expresses some attitude as an illocutionary act does not make the utterance an illocutionary act of the sort. For example, when a trickster deceives somebody, and says “Sorry” while grinning, it is not apologizing, even though a feeling of slight regret might be involved in the utterance.

What is missing in the speech act theory is the explanation of what makes an utterance a certain illocutionary act. Austin (1962) does not explain it clearly. The speaker’s intention in Searle’s (1969, 1979) sense does not explain how an utterance becomes a certain illocutionary act. As is observed in communication in daily life, the speaker’s intention of performing an act of apologizing does not guarantee the success of the illocutionary act of apologizing: the hearer might be too angry to accept the utterance as an apology, or the offence may be so serious and damaging that the utterance of “I’m sorry” is simply not good enough to be an illocutionary act of apologizing. Sociolinguists and pragmatists may have a better explanation of apologies, as is shown in the following.

## *1. 2 Pragmatics and sociolinguistics*

The definitions of apologies in pragmatics and sociolinguistics are generally based on Goffman's (1971) definition as "remedial work" (Fraser 1981, Owen 1983, Leech 1983, Holmes 1990b). In the following, Goffman's concept of remedial work is introduced, and the aspects of apologies revealed by regarding them as remedial work are explained. Then a more "pragmatic" definition given by Leech (1983) is discussed.

### *1.2.1 Erving Goffman (1971, 1981)*

The function of the remedial work is "to change the meaning that otherwise might be given to an act, transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable" (Goffman 1971: 109). Goffman then explains apologies as remedial work in saying "an apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule" (1971: 113). What Goffman's definition makes clear is that apologies are acts/moves whose meaning/value resides in the interaction between the speaker and the hearer. That is, unlike Searle's idea that the illocutionary value of the utterance is judged by the speaker's intention, acts in Goffman's sense are judged or recognized in an on-going discourse. When the speaker recognizes her utterance as an act of apologizing, that is, she utters it as an act of apologizing, she sees herself as an apologizer, who has a part as an offender, and another part as one who recognizes the offence and regrets it, and, therefore, affirms a belief in the offended social rule. This analysis can be extended to the hearer.

When the speaker recognizes the utterance as an act of apologizing to the hearer, she sees the hearer as a victim of the offence and also as the one who is reassured about the unjustifiability of the offence, and, therefore, about the validity of the offended rule. When the hearer accepts the utterance as an act of apologizing, he accepts to see the speaker as an apologizer and himself as the one apologized to.

Goffman's (1971) analysis indicates the complexity of the concept of speaker and hearer. When the speaker recognizes her utterance as an act of apologizing, she recognizes herself as an apologizer, who made an offence and regrets it. Then the speaker can be theoretically distinguished from the addresser as an apologizer: in apologizing, the speaker assumes the responsibility of the addresser as an apologizer. The speaker recognizes the hearer as one apologized to, who was a victim of the offence and is reassured about the unjustifiability of the offence. The hearer can then be theoretically distinguished from the addressee as one apologized to. In Goffman (1981) the concepts of speaker and hearer are developed in a different direction: the concept of speaker is divided into those of animator, author, and principal. In section 2, we continue to discuss this issue.

### 1.2.2 Geoffrey Leech (1983)

Leech's (1983) definition/description of apologies is influenced by Goffman's concept of remedial work, and he also inherits, from Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979), the characterization of the act of apologizing as a behabitive/expressive. Leech says "Apologies express regret for some offence committed by *s* against *h* ...

Nevertheless an apology implies a transaction, in that it is a bid to change the balance-sheet of the relation between *s* against *h*. If the apology is successful, it will result in *h*'s pardoning or excusing the offence" (1983: 124-25). Leech characterizes apologies as an act of expressing regret, like Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979), where some offence committed by the speaker against the hearer is presupposed, as in Searle (1979). Like Goffman (1971), Leech also describes apologies in the on-going discourse between the speaker and the hearer, and specifically emphasizes a transition, which is a change from the state in which the speaker offended the hearer to the state in which the speaker is forgiven by the hearer about the offence.

In Goffman's (1971) and Leech's (1983) analyses, social aspects of apologies are clarified. Apologies are the speaker's social acts to the hearer, where the speaker regards herself as an apologizer and the hearer as one apologized to, and tries to make her past offence forgiven by the hearer as a victim of the offence, by expressing regret for it. It is, however, still not clear how saying a few words, such as "I'm sorry" or "I apologize", in an appropriate situation is do this type of social act.

### 1.3 Apologies as an illocutionary act and a social act

As is the case with Leech (1983), many researchers try to combine the analysis of apologies as illocutionary acts with that of apologies as social acts. One of the pioneers in this field is Owen (1983), who not only presents an extensive research of apologies, but also attempts to combine the two perspectives of analyzing apologies: apologies as illocutionary acts and apologies as social

acts. Adopting Goffman's analysis of apologies as remedial moves, Owen classifies types of primary remedial moves of apologies in English, and describes the dialogic structure in which they are located. Owen also describes these remedial moves as illocutionary acts, adopting the analyses in Searle (1969, 1979), in particular, Searle's concept of indirect speech acts.

In Searle (1979), indirect speech acts are explained as illocutionary acts performed by way of performing another illocutionary act. Searle explains the utterance "I am sorry I did it" as an indirect speech act of apologizing, which is performed indirectly by way of asserting the satisfaction of the sincerity condition for the act: the speaker is sorry (1979: 54). Following Searle, Owen (1983) describes indirect speech acts of apologizing which are obtained by asserting for the satisfaction of each of the four felicity conditions, i.e., the propositional content rule, the preparatory rule, the sincerity rule, and the essential rule. She concludes that the existence of a natural class of indirect speech acts of apologizing is doubtful (121-126), which is often taken as general skepticism about specifying a class of sentences used to perform a particular illocutionary act indirectly (Levinson 1983).

## 2. A revised model of illocutionary acts

In Section 1 different definitions of apologies are provided, and some attempts to combine the analysis of apologies as illocutionary acts and that of apologies as social acts are introduced. In the present section, I propose a framework of illocutionary acts in which aspects of apologies as social acts are explained. Unlike

Owen (1983), I do this by developing Austin's (1962) idea of illocutionary acts rather than Searle's (1969, 1979).

### *2.1. Illocutionary acts of apologizing*

As is explained in the former section, within Austin's (1962) classification of illocutionary forces/acts, the act of apologizing is explained as a behabitive type, which is to react, or assume/express attitudes. More specifically, it is the speaker's act of reacting to her past conduct, and assuming or expressing an attitude of regret for it, while committing herself to avoiding the conduct. How can the act of apologizing be performed? How can the speaker assume an attitude of regret in saying an utterance? Austin dose not explain clearly how the speaker performs an illocutionary act, while Searle and other speech act theorists (Searle 1969, 1976, 1979, 1983, 1989[2002], Searle and Vanderveken 1985, and Bach and Harnish 1979) explain this in terms of the speaker's intention. Therefore we have to retrieve the idea Austin embedded in his arguments.

At the very beginning Austin (1962) introduces the distinction between performatives and constatives: in uttering a performative, the speaker performs an action, while in uttering a constative, she describes or reports a certain event or circumstance. How can the speaker perform, say, an act of apologizing in uttering a performative, "I apologize"? What is so unique about uttering performatives? The uniqueness seems to reside in the fact that the speaker specifies what she is doing in the utterance while saying the very utterance. What is it for the speaker to specify what she does in saying the utterance? The speaker might be making a move of assigning a certain value to the utterance as its

(illocutionary) force. In uttering “I apologize”, the speaker makes a move of assigning the value of apologizing to the utterance as its (illocutionary) force; while saying something, the speaker specifies that it is apologizing. In uttering a performative, by which the act that the speaker performs in the utterance is specified, the speaker openly or publicly assigns a particular value to the present utterance.

If I am right about the analysis of the nature of performatives, the theory of performatives can easily be extended to that of illocutionary acts, as is done by Austin (1962) himself. To perform an illocutionary act is generally to assign a certain value to the utterance as its illocutionary force, and, when an illocutionary act is performed by a performative, a value is explicitly specified and assigned to the utterance as its illocutionary force, through the specification of the act that the speaker performs in the utterance. In saying an utterance such as “I’m sorry”, “I blame myself”, and “It was my fault”, the speaker generally indicates the act of apologizing, and assigns the value of apologizing to the utterance as its illocutionary force. In uttering the performative “I apologize”, on the other hand, the speaker specifies the act that she performs in the utterance as the act of apologizing, and, in doing so, she assigns the value of apologizing to the utterance as its illocutionary force.

How is the illocutionary force of an utterance evaluated and given a particular value? Let us examine Austin’s (1962) felicity conditions. Austin first specifies them as the conditions under which the speaker felicitously performs an act in uttering a performative. If, as is claimed, to perform an illocutionary act by



means of a performative utterance is to specify the illocutionary force of an utterance, and to assign a value to it openly or publicly, the conditions under which performatives are felicitously performed show how illocutionary forces are specified and their values are assigned. That is, since illocutionary acts performed by performatives become infelicitous when the specified illocutionary forces are not the forces of the utterances, and, therefore, the assigned values cannot be given to the utterances, the ways illocutionary acts become felicitous or infelicitous indicate how the illocutionary forces of the utterances are evaluated.

If so, then the felicity conditions do not only show how the values of illocutionary forces of performative utterances are determined, but how the values of illocutionary forces of utterances in general are determined. This matches Austin's interpretation of the felicity conditions: they are, against common assumptions, conditions for illocutionary acts in general<sup>4</sup>. In the following section, Austin's felicity conditions are reexamined to find out the elements in terms of which values of the illocutionary forces of utterances, such as apologizing, are determined.

### *2.3 Austin's felicity conditions*

Before we start reexamining the felicity conditions, let us specify terminology to clarify the complexity of the speaker, the hearer, and the speech situation, which was suggested in section 1.2.1.

When the speaker performs a particular illocutionary act, which is explained, within the proposed theoretical framework, as an act of assigning a particular value to the illocutionary force of the present utterance, the speaker identifies herself as a

performer of the illocutionary act. The term addresser is used for the performer of the illocutionary act. The hearer is a particular person to whom the speaker utters something. When the speaker performs a particular illocutionary act, she identifies the hearer as a receiver of the illocutionary act. The term addressee is used for the receiver of the illocutionary act. When the speaker and the hearer communicate, they are in a particular situation. When the speaker performs a particular illocutionary act, she identifies the circumstances of the present speech situation as the situation of the illocutionary act. The term context is used for the situation of the illocutionary act. For example, when the speaker performs the illocutionary act of apologizing in uttering the performative utterance “I apologize” or a non-performative utterance, say, “It was my fault”, the speaker identifies herself as the addresser of apologizing, the hearer as the addressee to whom apologizing is made, and the circumstances of the present speech situation as the context of apologizing.

Let us start with Austin’s felicity conditions (A.1) and (A.2):

- (A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,
- (A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked. (Austin 1962: 14-15)

The felicity condition (A.1) shows that the value of the

illocutionary force of an utterance is specified with a certain effect, which is produced conventionally by the utterance of a particular addresser to a particular addressee in a particular context. The felicity condition (A.2) shows that the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance is also specified by a particular speaker, a particular hearer, and the particular circumstances of the present speech situation. That is, to specify the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance as, say, apologizing, is to say the utterance as the addresser of apologizing, who reacts to her past conduct, expresses/assumes regret for it, asks the addressee for forgiveness, and commits herself to avoiding the conduct. It is also to say the utterance to the hearer as the addressee of apologizing, who suffered/suffers from the speaker's past conduct, and is asked for forgiveness. It is, furthermore, to say the utterance in the speech situation of the context of apologizing, where the speaker's past offence is foregrounded. That is, the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance is specified in terms of the conventional effect produced by the utterance that the speaker says as a specified addresser, to the hearer as a specified addressee, in the speech situation as a specified context.

Next let us discuss Austin's felicity conditions (B.1) and (B.2):

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely. (Austin 1962: 14-15)

Usually these conditions are not given any significance. This is because felicity conditions (A.1) and (A.2) specify there being

certain persons and circumstances for an illocutionary act to be successfully performed, and those persons and their actions do not have to be specified again by separate felicity conditions. However, if the speaker is theoretically separated from the addresser, or the hearer is from the addressee, there are enough reasons for positing felicity conditions (B.1) and (B.2). As we explained above, felicity conditions (A.1) and (A.2) specify, to assign a particular value to the utterance as its illocutionary force, what addresser the speaker has to be, and what addressee the hearer has to be. These conditions do not specify how the speaker and the hearer have to act/ behave. Even though there are conventions which specify the effect of an utterance, and persons and circumstances for the effect to be brought about, a particular instance of assigning a value to the illocutionary force of the utterance does not occur unless particular persons, the present speaker and the present hearer, act/ behave in a certain way. The speaker always has a choice to assign a different value to the illocutionary force of the utterance, or not to perform any illocutionary act at all. The hearer also has a choice not to acknowledge the value even though the speaker goes through the procedure of assigning the value according to the convention. Assigning a value also fails when the speaker says a wrong thing as a slip of the tongue, or the hearer does not hear what the speaker says, and, therefore, does not react to it. That is, the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance is specified in terms of the speaker's actual action of saying the utterance, which exhibits her commitment, and the hearer's reaction to it, which exhibits his involvement.

Let us finally examine felicity conditions ( $\Gamma$ .1) and ( $\Gamma$ .2):

( $\Gamma$ .1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

( $\Gamma$ .2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.  
(Austin 1962: 15)

These conditions specify that the speaker's thoughts/feelings and intentions for a future action should be identical with those of the addresser she says the present utterance as. A certain value, say, apologizing, can be given to the illocutionary act of an utterance only when the speaker is sorry for her past conduct, and has an intention to avoid the conduct in the future. The speaker's thoughts/feelings and intentions for a future action cannot be known for sure, but the presence or absence of these thoughts/feelings and intentions is often known from the way she says the utterance, her non-verbal behaviour, and even the knowledge of the speaker's character or her personal history. This explains the reason why an angry customer gets angrier when a telephone operator says "I'm sorry" just as a formality, or a politician's apologizing to a political opponent is rejected: the speaker is not sorry, or is not sorry enough to be the addresser of apologizing.

Let us summarize the analyses so far. Austin's felicity conditions in (A) show that the value of the illocutionary force

of an utterance is specified in terms of the conventional effect produced by the utterance that the speaker says as a specified addresser, to the hearer as a specified addressee, in the speech situation as a specified context. Austin's felicity conditions in (B) show that the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance is specified in terms of the speaker's action of saying the utterance, which exhibits her commitment, and the hearer's reaction to it, which exhibits his involvement. Austin's felicity conditions in (Γ) show that the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance is specified in terms of the speaker's thoughts/feelings and intentions for a future action as a specified addresser.

#### *2.4 Illocutionary acts as social acts*

If the proposed analyses of the illocutionary force of an utterance are correct, specifying the value of the illocutionary force of an utterance by means of a performative utterance is a significant move in communication, and can put the communication or the speaker's power of managing the communication at risk. In specifying the value by means of a performative utterance, the speaker specifies so many aspects of the communication without talking about them. In saying "I apologize", the speaker specifies herself as the addresser of apologizing, the hearer as the addressee of apologizing, and the speech situation as a context of apologizing, while indicating an object to apologize for, and invites the hearer to accept this specification of the communicative aspects of the present speech situation. In saying "I apologize", the speaker also exhibits her commitment as the addresser of apologizing, and requests the hearer's involvement as the addressee

to whom apologizing is made. Furthermore, the speaker exhibits her thoughts/feelings and her commitment for a future action without saying so.

It is no wonder that performatives are not often used except in formal situations. Unless they are in formal situations where the speaker is more or less specified as a certain addresser, the hearer as a certain addressee, and the situations as a certain context, people do not want to openly specify many aspects of the communication, exhibit their commitments, request the hearer's involvement, and express their thoughts/feelings and commitments. Communication is usually a more careful endeavour to negotiate (i) the ways in which conversation participants address each other, and the context in which they are in, (ii) the degrees of the commitment/involvement requested/expected by them, and (iii) the expression of thoughts, feelings, and intentions expected/requested by them.

How does the speaker assign a value to the illocutionary force of the utterance by a non-performative means? Since the illocutionary force of the utterance is evaluated in terms of (i) the effect of the utterance, which is brought about by the utterance of the speaker as a certain addresser, to the hearer as a certain addressee, in the speech situation of a certain context, (ii) the speaker's commitment and the hearer's involvement, and (iii) the exhibition of speaker's thoughts, feelings, and intentions, it is quite likely that non-performatives utterance which indicate these elements are used.

So-called apology strategies (Fraser 1981, Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Owen 1983, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Blum-Kulka et al

1989, Trosberg 1987) seem to show strategies of assigning the value of apologizing as the illocutionary force of an utterance by non-performative means. Fraser (1981: 263), for example, describes nine strategies as follows:

- (1) announcing that you are apologizing,
- (2) stating one's obligation to apologize,
- (3) offering to apologize,
- (4) requesting the hearer to accept an apology,
- (5) expressing regret for the offence,
- (6) requesting forgiveness for the offense,
- (7) acknowledging responsibility for the offending act,
- (8) promising forbearance from a similar offending act,
- (9) offering redress.

In strategy (1), (2), (3), (5), and (7), the speaker assigns the value of apologizing to the illocutionary force of an utterance by showing that she is the addresser of apologizing: she is apologizing, is offering to apologize, has an obligation to apologize, regrets for the offence, or is responsible for the offending act. In strategy (4) and (6), the speaker does so by inviting the hearer to be the addressee to whom apologizing is made: the hearer is requested to accept an apology or forgive the offense. In strategy (8) and (9) the speaker does so by exhibiting her intention as that of the addresser of apologizing: she is promising forbearance from a similar act, or is offering redress.

Olshtain and Cohen limit the number of apology strategies to five: “an expression of an apology”, “an explanation or account of



the situation”, “an acknowledgment of responsibility”, “an offer of repair”, and “a promise of forbearance” (1983: 22). They can be analyzed in a similar fashion as non-performative means of assigning the value of apologizing to the illocutionary force of an utterance.

There seem to be culture-specific preferences for what addresser the speaker identifies herself as, and what addressee the speaker regards the hearer as. Mey (2001) provides an example of a conversation in Japanese in which a customer utters “*Sumimasen*” (“I’m sorry”) to a clerk for an unpaid service, and says “[the expression of apology] appears unexpectedly at a point where we in English assume an expression of gratitude to be in order, such as ‘Thanks a lot’” (2001: 263). This shows that the speaker has a choice as to which addresser she assumes, i.e., the addresser of apologizing, who apologizes for causing trouble for the clerk, or the addresser of thanking, who thanks for an extra service from the clerk. There seems to be preference, in Japanese culture, for saying an utterance as the addresser of apologizing in this type of situation.

There also seem to be culture-specific preferences for how the speaker specifies the illocutionary force of an utterance in given cases. The extended research on apologies from a cross-cultural perspective done by Blum-Kulka *et al* (1989) and Olshtain (1989) can be reanalyzed as the issues of which aspect/aspects of the utterance—(i) the effect of the utterance, and an addresser, an addressee, and a context, (ii) the speaker’s commitment and the hearer’s involvement, or (iii) the exhibition of speaker’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions—the speaker indicates in assigning the

value of apologizing in given cases. Such analyses will reveal not only cultural preferences, but also culturally specific patterns of building social relationships, which are explained as reasons for those preferences.

The minute analyses of the addresser, the addressee, and the context specified by the value of apologizing as well as those of the aspect/aspects of the utterance the speaker indicates in assigning a value to the illocutionary force of the utterance may contribute to the clarification of politeness and gender issues. This is because the issues in question seem to be the social relation between the speaker and the hearer, or men and women, which is specified or indicated by way of the social relation between the addresser and the addressee. I will just mention the analyses of the issues of politeness and gender in the literature, which the proposed theory should incorporate.

Brown (1980) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) develop a theory of politeness in which communication is explained as avoiding face-threatening acts; people apologize for imposition as a negative-politeness strategy.

Although the face-saving view is influential, there are other views of politeness, which are explained by Fraser (1990) as the *social-norm view*, the *conversational-maxim view* adopted by Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983), and the *conversational-contract view* adopted by Fraser (1975, 1990) and Fraser and Nolen (1981). Brown and Levinson's claim of the universality of the concepts of negative and positive face is criticized by researchers of politeness in non-Western cultures. They claim Brown and Levinson's model does not address adequately communicative behaviours in non-

Western cultures, where the primary interactional focus is not upon individualism but upon group identity (Matsumoto 1988, 1989, Ide 1989, Bharuthram 2003)<sup>5</sup> or where politeness signals different moral meaning or normative values (Bergman and Kasper 1993, Gu 1990, Nwoye 1992, Mao 1994)<sup>6</sup>. There is also an issue of degrees of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that the higher the level of indirectness, the greater the degree of politeness, but this does not apply to the case of apologies (Holmes 1990b). A gender issue of apologizing, i.e., how men and women use apology strategies, is thoroughly discussed by Holmes (1986, 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1993, 1995) and Meyerhoff (1999, 2000, 2003).

### 3. Conclusion

Apologies as illocutionary and social acts are explained in the proposed theoretical framework, in which the illocutionary act is explained as the speaker's move of assigning a value to the illocutionary force of the utterance; in doing so, the speaker identifies herself as a certain addresser, the hearer as a certain addressee, and the present speech situation as a certain context. The different aspects of the utterance are clarified as the elements in terms of which a value as the illocutionary force of the utterance is specified. Accordingly, the act of apologizing is explained as the speaker's assigning the value of apologizing to the illocutionary force of an utterance, which is specified as (i) the effect of the utterance, and an addresser, an addressee, and a context, (ii) the speaker's commitment and the hearer's involvement, and (iii) the exhibition of speaker's thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Social aspects of the act of apologizing are

explained in terms of (i) the social aspect of the speaker's move of assigning the value of apologizing, and (ii) the social relation between the speaker and the hearer which is specified or indicated by the social relation between the addresser and the addressee. The latter can be extended to explain the issues of politeness and gender.

<sup>1</sup>Throughout the present paper I refer to the speaker as "she/her" and the hearer as "he/him". There is, however, no gender implication involved in this usage.

<sup>2</sup>The act of apologizing is not included in the examples of illocutionary acts specified by these four rules (Searle 1969: 66-67). However, the extension of these analyses to different illocutionary acts, such as apologizing, seems to be straightforward.

<sup>3</sup>Bach (2007) makes a similar point.

<sup>4</sup>See Sbisà (2007: 464) for this argument.

<sup>5</sup>See Wierzbicka (1991) for general arguments of language- or culture-specificity of illocutionary acts.

<sup>6</sup>See also Jenney and Arndt (1993), Watts (2003), and Watts et al. (1992).

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